

Invisible violence in aging

La violencia invisible en la vejez

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ABSTRACT: Different areas surrounding the elderly where structural violence is expressed, are presented in this paper, considering the factors that influence their development, harmony and well-being; and those elements that involve the existence of unequal access and use of the material and social resources which impact adversely on their quality of life. So an analysis of the actions taken by the state to reduce existing inequalities and their impact on the welfare of the elderly is also presented.

Keywords: Structural violence; Well-Being; Aging.

RESUMEN: *El propósito de este artículo es exponer los diferentes ámbitos que rodean al adulto mayor donde se expresa la violencia estructural, considerando los factores que inciden en su desarrollo, convivencia y bienestar; así como aquellos elementos que involucran la existencia de un desigual uso y acceso a los recursos materiales y sociales, que repercuten en su calidad de vida. Se analizan las acciones realizadas por el Estado para reducir las desigualdades existentes y su impacto en el bienestar de los adultos mayores.*

Palabras clave: *Violencia estructural; Bienestar; Vejez.*

Introduction

Violence can manifest itself in any field of life, from economic, political, social, and cultural spheres up to the domestic aspect. Violence forms part of a constituted order and is construed within a social structure, coming therefore from a systemic and hidden nature; it comprises a series of behaviors coming from a social system that offers unequal opportunities to its members and shows up through an unequal power (Galtung, 1995). This form of violence is known as structural violence which alludes to forms of violence and inequality generated by social structures¹.

Structural violence has a distinctive character specifically within elderly group (unlike other vulnerable groups) due to biological deterioration and diverse realities involving aging process. However, biological decrement represents only one obstacle for this group of people, as structural violence manifests itself through high levels of poverty, insufficient social protection, disparities at power levels, reduced social recognition, absence of both political participation and individual freedom, as well as lack of control over production, education, healthiness, and life expectancy factors. The inadequate justice systems and deteriorated traditional systems of familiar support, besides social prejudices and negative stereotypes surrounding aging process, are situations that structurally impinge upon the elderly by limiting the fulfillment of their basic necessities in relation to survival, wellbeing, identity, and freedom (Parra & Tortosa, 2003).

Different areas surrounding the elderly where structural violence is expressed, are presented in this paper, considering the factors that influence their development, harmony and well-being; and those elements that involve the existence of unequal access and use of the material and social resources (Parra, & Tortosa, 2003), which impact adversely on their quality of life. So an analysis of the actions taken by the state to reduce existing inequalities and their impact on the welfare of the elderly is also presented.

¹ The inequalities existing among individuals, groups, and societies are the ones which prevent people from fulfilling their fundamental, material, and spiritual needs.

Expression Areas of structural violence

Economic Field

Economic situation of the elderly is mainly determined by individual's working conditions along his/her life (formal, informal, or temporary job) and by the characteristics of the pension's public system (López & Maderuelo, 1999). In theory, most of the older adults derive their income from a Social Security Pension's System. However, conditions differ in Mexico, as those persons having a pension or retirement² granted by the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) or from the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers (ISSSTE) represents only 26.2% of the elderly population – more than one million eight hundred twenty thousand right-holders (Republic Presidency, 2001). Most of them receive pensions that represent in average 1.01 and 1.26 minimum wages from IMSS and ISSSTE respectively. In other words, 73.8% of the elderly population does not enjoy economic support and only one fourth of the total population remains still active; therefore, insufficient income, employment uncertainty, unemployment, and lack of access to economic resources impinge upon the elderly group (Alepuz, 2001).

Due to insufficiencies and inequalities of our development, there are more than 4 million of aged people lacking even this minimum aid; the great majority of the elderly does not have pensions nor an institutional endorsement that allows them to have a monthly income certainty (Parra, 1999), and almost two thirds of those having them do not get enough income to cover their basic needs. Deficient social protection currently existing in our country impinges structurally upon the elderly population by converting them into people totally dependent from transference systems (State, relatives, savings and investment, or charity). This situation clearly shows inequalities existing in distribution and access to resources and possibility of using them; therefore, older adults do not structurally have the possibility of living under essential conditions, which consequently impacts their life's quality.

Economic deprivation or poverty suffered by the elderly represents a greater degree of vulnerability compared to other groups of population, since income and/or insufficiency of the same is an important factor related to capacity to work, function

² Issue of pension and retirement is very wide and complex due to the impact and social importance affecting all fields; however, it will be used here to highlight the way social protection structurally impinges upon the elderly.

independently, and maintain a reasonable standard of living (Help Age International, 2002). Economic deprivation restricts access to a standard of living that will help them obtain those minimum satisfiers in order to cover their fundamental necessities and rights, causing then a high correlation between poverty and violence. That is the way indicated by Ribeiro (2000): “The elderly are found invariably and disproportionately among groups of greater poverty; they lack savings and goods, do not enjoy a pension and only rarely have access to an income, social protection, and other benefits”.

Poverty hampers individual’s access to formal jobs, fair housing, suitable health services, good education, and justice systems; on the other hand, poverty is intrinsically related to health status (Ribeiro, 2000). In other words, a whole life in poverty brings about poor health, undernourishment, besides limits access to medications and to a suitable attention, contributing with it to the perpetuation of the same ill health status. Poor health limits the elderly capacity to make an income and their capacity to work and function independently, trapping them in a vicious circle that generates ignorance and dependence (Help Age International, 2002). This triple inequality affects individuals in all aspects of their lives, because it prevents them from participating at all levels of society, including economic, social, and political activities.

Also, poverty is a denial of human rights, because, people living in poverty experience violations to their human rights (Report ESCR, 2007). That is, poverty reflects the failure of the State that provide economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights; such as: the right to food, to adequate housing, the right to health, protection and assistance to the family, the right to social security, the right to work under equitable and satisfactory conditions, among others. This failure to comply these rights affects individuals in all aspects of his life, as it prevents them from having an effective participation in society at all levels, including economic, social and political work.

In synthesis, poverty is in itself a form of violence and is structurally conditioned by not guaranteeing access to goods such as food, water, clothing, health, and education. There exist aimed-at-the-elderly programs in Mexico included in the National Development Program 2007-2012 for diminishing poverty, whose governing objective is fairness and equality for all Mexicans. However, for the elderly community and due to existing inequalities, the risk of falling into poverty situations is greater each time. Therefore, it is necessary to develop integral policies, where not only efforts for

reducing economic deprivation are focused on but to take into account diverse circumstances that involve and sustain poverty.

Political Field

Political deprivation to the older adults as a form of structural violence generates distinct living opportunities and manifests itself in the absence of power, lack of active participation in society, and/or in the decision-making process that affect their daily life, lack of legal protection, absence of political participation and representation, and in the scarce social recognition and individual freedom. By not participating in society, the older adults find themselves limited to decide on priority issues which concern them as a social group within the political agenda, thus reducing their capacity for inferring in planning and social community management, moreover inhibiting human capital growth, making production difficult and limiting ideas and social resources interchanges.

Nowadays, although some laws, public policies, and national plans have been developed to promote participation of the older adults within the political life, their dispositions are obstructed due to lack of power and social recognition. The absence of power and recognition of the older adults makes it difficult for them to claim services, to know and negotiate their rights, to react against mistreatment, violence, and abandonment, to demand accessible information, and to protest against age and gender discrimination (Barreto, 2003). Absence of power and recognition places individuals in a disadvantageous situation due to their invisible and power-lacking position within society which affects and conditions the older adults' possibilities and potentialities thus maintaining the existing inequalities.

Social Field

Social deprivation to the older adults as a form of structural violence is caused by rupture of social and familial ties, devaluation of social capital, and decrement of mechanisms for organic and community solidarity. Causes of social deprivation are due

to diverse factors, being among them: a) changes in family structure, b) invisibility of social capital, and c) rupture of traditional solidarities (Villamán, 2005).

Changes in family structure have affected directly and indirectly the capacity and resources the families count on to give support to their elderly, and to satisfy with it their fundamental, material, and spiritual necessities. These changes are found in direct relation to the increasing incorporation of women into the working world, lower number of family members, appearance of new family models, and longer permanence of children at home (Ribeiro, 2000). In addition, some transformations are also observed within the family such as reformulation of parental functions, decrease of both inter and intra-family ties, and features of intergenerational transmission, as well as certain decrement of trans-generational authority, transformation of female role models, power redistribution between the couple, and evolution in setting goals or shared projects (Riso, 2001). All these changes have weakened family ties and solidarity, and as a result, the new family structure begins little by little excluding the elderly community because it is incapable of integrating them into its new organization and unable to cover their basic living needs.

Devaluation of social capital³ for the elder population occurs when its contribution is not taken into account, that is to say, when this contribution is invisible to society. The significance of disregarding social capital of the elderly lies in that society loses, in all aspects, important transferences as for knowledge, experiences, and valuable skills, starting from culture, environment, model reproduction to support family, maternity and raising children. Devaluation of social capital prevent us from realizing that “old people” are not only service seekers; but they also have an important role within many families as emotional support and complement, substituting their own children in tasks of upbringing. In addition, they fulfill important roles in economy of the family by contributing either with money from their pensions or with non-remunerated work that allows other members of the family to work outside home (Ribeiro, 2000). Effectiveness of investing in social capital for the older adults brings extra benefits since it also prolongs the independence period and contribution to society (Help Age International, 2002).

Rupture of traditional solidarities represents dissolution of national solidarity. This situation can be demonstrated in one of social life aspects that were essential

³ Refer to the Social Devaluation and Violence Section.

during a long time: *the state of well-being* as a way of setting up social solidarity (Villamán, 2005). State of well-being represented an important structure in social security which established a social balance by distributing resources in an equitable way with the objective of diminishing social inequality. However, contemporary society has evolved towards a society of individual consumption eliminating shared sense of goods distribution for common good. When social solidarity falls apart, possibilities of construing and developing equitable social growth, aimed at satisfying social necessities, reduce radically; therefore, this structural adjustment constitutes a form of structural violence against the older adults, since it largely contributes to increase existing social inequalities.

Social exclusion is another form of structural violence in the social sphere, exclusion does not refer solely to the insufficiency of financial resources, but goes beyond. It represents an accumulation of limitations (education, health, housing, credit, employment, justice), that prevent people or groups deprived from them from having access to goods or rights considered basic (Jiménez *et al.*, 2003). Social exclusion among the older adults as a form of structural violence manifests itself through the mentioned restriction to opportunities which hinders capacity of living and coexisting with society.

Social exclusion as an expression of structural violence is registered in the historical framework of contemporary societies, manifesting itself through social inequalities and/or intense collective needs (Subirats, 2003). In this sense, exclusion expresses the existing inequalities in accessing services and economic goods of an industrial society, which transform and integrate themselves to a new postindustrial society. This new configuration of existing social inequalities impacts and fragments the social tissue causing a social rift in terms of in/out.

In order to understand the notion of exclusion, it is necessary to also relate it to the notion of integration and to power systems within a common space and time. In other words, being excluded refers to that individual or social group that is outside of the common space and time since it does not belong to the power relation system within society and therefore does not have the opportunity to contribute with significant elements to social system. The individual or group not fulfilling this condition does not exist, it lacks value and recognition. Exclusion is the phenomenon lived by those

relegated in a no-sense aspect, out of any access-to-power possibility (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2003).

Social exclusion constitutes a multi-factorial and multi-dimensional phenomenon⁴, and therefore it is not explained from a single cause or condition nor its effects are isolated. In other words, it is a phenomenon formed by articulation of a combination from unfavorable circumstances, often strongly interrelated (Jiménez *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, it has a complex character, formed by multiple aspects and hardly admitting segmented definitions, being the reason for which one-dimensional and sectorial treatment on social exclusion is little effective because as considered a public agenda issue, it requires integral approaches for its definition, and horizontal and transverse ones for its management processes (Subirats, 2003). The importance of exclusion in society lies in that it means a denial of individual rights every person must enjoy, excluding the older adults from social life through age discrimination (Help Age International, 2002).

In our society, discrimination due to age arises from youth overvaluation, modernity, physical attraction, with youth value very rooted in our minds⁵. This desire for remaining young creates a denial of aging process as such, creating prejudices, discrimination, and abuses towards the elderly (Luna, 1999)⁶. It is feasible to understand because simultaneously with youth message transmitted, there appears a hidden message that is the devaluation of old age⁷, ambivalent messages that involve characteristics completely opposite and non-complementary.

Discrimination as a form of structural violence is manifested itself by granting greater power and value to certain groups and dismissing power and recognition to others (in this case to the elderly population). A society will generate greater discrimination, insofar as its capacity for producing a shared sense for its members and insofar as it reduces the possibilities of the majority to have power influence on them (International Working Organization, s/f) (ILO, 2003). The devaluation of old age and lack of power within said group segregate the older adult community from the rest of society by denying a position to them within the same and by ignoring their

⁴ Educative, formative, sanitary, relational...

⁵ It is a community conscience value that has rooted to a large extent by publicity and consumerism.

⁶ Our collective stereotypes regarding older adults are concreted in some negative social practices that in one way or another reflect a same fundamental reality: we live in a society in which there is not, truly speaking, a place for the elderly (Laforest, 1991).

⁷ Older adults are exposed to suffer discrimination as they are non-productive, passive, inactive, dependent persons, no looking ahead to the future, and/or poor.

fundamental rights and entitlements regarding survival, well being, identity, and freedom (Parra & Tortosa, 2003).

Discrimination towards the elderly also occurs when there are overprotecting behaviors that void their capacity to decide on subjects that are incumbent directly on to them or that confine them to a depressing inaction (Barreto, 2003). Overprotection towards an older adult transmits a hidden message of incapacity which brings about a deep sense of uselessness to the elderly by being treated like a minor and restricting their possibility of an independent life. This protecting vision towards elder adults also projects a message of inability to make personal decisions, committing sometimes important abuses against them starting from disposition of goods (properties, savings, etc.) up to confining them into retirement homes against their will. It is worrisome that paternalistic and handout approaches are very frequent in many private and public institutions (Barreto, 2003), so it is important to transmit and share a different vision about old age at these levels, so the elderly can attain a more appropriate treatment regarding their social interaction.

Cultural Field

From cultural sphere, aging derives from social valuation of old age as a stage of life cycle. Within our capitalist-western society, old age does not represent a stage with possibilities and limitations like any other. On the contrary, old age is seen like a phenomenon opposing hegemonic values of capitalism, that is to say, old age is antagonistic to the values of competition, individualism, productivity, consumption, youth, and aggressiveness. According to this approach, valuation of the elderly is construed negatively from what they no longer are: young, autonomous, healthy, useful, consumer, and self-sufficient (Morales, 1999).

“Current structure of our society establishes most of its value on economic power, derived from income obtained from work; since older adult does not work, he/she does not have a high status, neither economic nor social” (Moragas, 1991, p.238). The fact that older adults do not form part of the economically active population within a society that privileges the economic sphere it means that they are deprived from the value granted from producing; not performing an economic activity involves

doing nothing, being nothing, and being perceived as a burden to others (Morán, 2004, p.47). This situation negatively pigeonholes the elderly as passive people, separated from the productive process, and as system-dependents (Morales, 1999) which perpetuates devaluation towards this age group.

Social devaluation as a form of structural violence also occurs by lack of a socio-cultural definition of a set of activities that would be specific for this population group (Morán, 2004, p.68), that is to say, older adults do not have established neither position nor function within society and do not participate, therefore, in the economic, social, political, and cultural resources enjoyed by the rest of society they live in. This lack of social role definition causes multiple consequences to the elderly community as both position and social function grant a place within society, besides stating rights and duties (Morán, 2004, p.68); by performing such activities, older adults could be perceived as useful persons, achieving social recognition at the same time.

The lack of specific tasks, culturally speaking, entails difficulty of knowing where to concentrate efforts and where to center own potentialities (Barros, 1997, as cited in Morán, 2004, p.19). It can be mentioned that lack of definition of a social role for older adult also involves individuals difficulty to give their life a complete sense of self-realization during old age, since part of the sense of life is gotten precisely when basic role assigned by society is accomplished. To the light of the aforementioned, it can be claimed that a great part of the physical, economic, and psychosocial burdens that accompany aging process are not attributable to age by itself but it is the product of the way society is structured (Morán, 2004). In conclusion, the current organization of our society in active and passive individuals, along non-definition regarding social function of this population sector, has brought about a basically negative collective attitude in relation to old age, that would come represented by a collection of prejudices, stereotypes⁸, and discriminations applied to persons as age advances.

Importance of stereotypes lies on the perception made of reality and the consequences resulting from that. Specifically within the elderly population there exist negative stereotypes that pigeonhole individuals in images not necessarily representing them. Stereotypes involving old age concept establish themselves around the dominant western vision which links old age with physical decrepitude, dependency, and ill health

⁸ Stereotypes are those internal images that designate categories, and also reflect and express social dynamics and are part of the culture (Martín-Baro, 1985).

status⁹ (Ulysse and Lesemann, 1997, as cited in Ribeiro, 2002). This derogatory vision of old age backs itself on the ideology named “oldism” which defines old age as a stage of mere decadence, both physically and mentally, projecting an image of disability, social uselessness, and rigidity on the elderly regardless of their current living situation and condition. By making these ideas theirs, the elderly end up perceiving themselves in such terms, accepting their deterioration like something fatal and assuming an attitude of resignation and apathy against what is happening to them, thus limiting their expectations of self-improvement (Morán, 2004, p.47).

The old age concept is developed in a two-sense way, both the image others have regarding older adults and the image the latter have of themselves. Both visions are closely related, up to the point of becoming dependent from each other. This is the way stated by Pinillos (1994) as cited in Yubero and Larrañaga (1999): “One ends up being in what he thinks he is, and what he thinks he is depends many times on what others say he is and on what they are saying he is”. This affirmation indicates the importance it has for older adult the old-age image that society and people surrounding him project on him. In addition, social image created on old age will have a determining influence on the attitudes and behaviors of his close social group and on the own behavior of the older adult (Yubero & Larrañaga, 1999).

Family Field

The elderly face every day subtle or open forms of mistreatment within the family. In some cases they can be upset gestures, indifference, disapproval, prolonged silences, isolation, or negligence; other times it can be rude words and even physical violence. Most of older adults have adopted a devalued social image of old age which influences on their behavior towards the family, their self-esteem, and well being.

Family violence as a manifestation of structural violence reflects inequalities regarding distribution, access, and possibility of using resources. In other words, the elderly have to gain their place and position within their family by performing extra tasks¹⁰ to be able to be entitled to those resources, as a way of compensating their

⁹ This vision emphasizes more on dysfunctions observed by associating them to pathologic aging.

¹⁰ Such as going out to buy bread or the newspaper, staying home to take care of grandchildren while adults work or go to parties, taking care of a sick family member (older women generally), among others (Barreto, s/f).

presence and dependencies. And therefore, the family accepts such compensation as something natural. Family violence against the elderly as a form of structural violence manifests itself through negotiation of their basic rights, which hinders the capacity of living and coexisting with society.

As opposed to all these manifestations of structural violence, the *State* tries to compensate existing inequalities through social policies by executing the concept of *Social Welfare*, that is to say, by means of a set of actions aimed at improving the living conditions of the population (social, economic and legal), in order to favor citizen equality, supporting possibilities of personal development and satisfaction of necessities” (Diaz, 1994, p.110). Therefore, the objective of the social policies towards the older adults consists on creating appropriate conditions to attain equality of opportunities in accessing services and material goods besides eliminating social inequalities to allow the satisfaction of fundamental necessities (Parra & Tortosa, 2003). The following section will expose social policies addressed to the elderly and implemented in our country whose main purpose consists on reducing the existing inequalities translated into structural violence.

The Social Policy addressed to older adults in Mexico

The National Institute of Senior Citizens (INSEN), a depending organism of the Secretariat of Health and created by Presidential Decree on August 22, 1979, proposed to protect and take care of older adults over 60 years regarding mainly the medical-welfare aspect. However, due to the increment of necessities from the elderly population, the Institute was transferred in January 2002 to the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL), changing its name to National Institute in the Prime of Life (INAPLEN) and extending its social objective with the purpose of offering, effectively and efficiently, the integral human development to the elderly through rescuing family and social values, education for health and employment, taking special care of the older adults that may be found in any situation of social disadvantage and that may require partial, total, temporary, or permanent support, thus avoiding their discrimination and social exclusion (Instituto Nacional De Las Personas Adultas Mayores. [INAPAM]. (2012).

The declaration of the “International Year of the Elderly”, and the “Fourth Worldwide Conference on Aging” celebrated in Canada led Mexico to carry out the event on “Aging and Population Policies Workshop” with the purpose of reviewing and evaluating policies implemented in this area, and based on the same, to build a society for all ages. This event was organized by the National Council of Population in collaboration with the Commission of Population and Development of the Mexican Republic’s House of Representatives and Senators (Tuiran, 1999).

In order to legalize social policies, legislative power approved the “Law of Older Adults’ Rights”, issued in 2003 by the Council of Inter-institutional Coordination for Older Adults, which legally structures INAPAM as the governing public organism of public policy for this age group¹¹. Based on that law, the main purpose of public policies is: “To instill within the family, State, and society a culture of appreciation for old age in order to attain a fair treatment, to favor its revaluation and full social integration, as well as looking for greater sensitivity, social awareness, respect, solidarity, and coexistence among generations with the purpose of preventing all forms of discrimination and forgetfulness, either due to age, gender, physical status, or social condition”. Also, social policies “seek to motivate integral human development of older adults by integrating the gender equity principle; with the purpose of guaranteeing equality of rights, opportunities, and responsibilities of the elderly”.

The objective of The National Institute of Older Adults (INAPAM)¹² after the publication of the “Law of Rights of Older Adults” is:

(...)to protect, care, help and guide older adults, as well as to understand and analyze their problems to find appropriate solutions, forcing to enhance welfare policies in this population, confirming self as the governing body of the public policies that give attention to those people that are 60 and older, with a focus on integral human development in each of its powers and functions, directing its efforts to promote medical care, legal advice and options occupancy (INAPAM 2002) (Ley De Los Derechos De Las Personas Adultas Mayores, 2002).

¹¹ Main principles are: a) autonomy and self-realization; b) participation; c) equity; d) co-responsibility; and e) preferential attention.

¹² INAPLEN and INAPAM are different institutions but with same objectives regarding assistance. The difference lies on the fact that INAPAM is legally sustained by the Law of Older Adults.

Institutions involved in the attention to the older adults are: the Secretariat of Social Development, Secretariat of Public Education, Institutions from the Health Sector (IMSS and ISSSTE), Secretariat of Communications and Transportation, Public Institutions for Housing, System for the Integral Development of the Family, Secretariat of Tourism, and Secretariat for Employment and Social Prevision (INAPAM, 2012). Each of these institutions must carry out concrete actions to guarantee the exercise of the elderly rights, giving value to their capacities and skills. The Secretariat for Employment and Social Prevision includes the Management Office of Gender and Equity which is in charge of assisting vulnerable groups such as the elderly in this case (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (2003).

The Congress of the Union agreed later on the need to legally support integrity of social policies and programs in order to provide assistance to the elderly regarding housing, food, health, property regularization, and a fair pension among others, thus increasing the quality of life of individuals (Congress of the Union, 2004). At the same time, the 2001-2006 National Development Plan recognizes the elderly population as a social group in disadvantage, understanding old age as a stage requiring special actions according to its different but also important and valued capacities. It is considered that there are great necessities at this stage to be able to attain an integral human development, such as food, health, education, housing, job, practice of sports, access to cultural and recreational activities, as well as respect to human rights.

Implementation of Social Policies to diminish structural violence

The population of older adults continues being recognized as a vulnerable social group within the National Development Plan 2007-2012 and it is trying to encourage social welfare toward the elderly living in poverty and under vulnerability conditions, giving priority to the population of 70 years old or over, who lives in rural communities with the greatest marginalization rates. Its main lines of action weigh up medical assistance for older adults living in poverty and/or in rural areas. At the same time, the State recognizes itself as the responsible one for assuring their economic sustenance due to insufficiencies in social protection systems. It tries as well to take advantage of older adults' social capital by developing opportunities that will allow their interaction in

productive activities within their communities (PND 2007-2012) (Republic Presidency, 2007) .

Health policies directed to provide social welfare for older adults are being implemented thanks to the “Aging Assistance Program” coordinated by the Secretariat of Health. The general Objective of the Program consists on protecting health, preventing or delaying appearance of illnesses or disabilities of major importance and enhancing elderly life quality in an integral way. In addition, in order to watch compliance with those objectives, the “National Committee of Aging Assistance” (CONAEN) was created to standardize criteria in order to approach older adults’ problems in a unified way throughout the country (Secretariat of Health, 2001).

To promote well-being among the elderly in Mexico, there are currently diverse programs coordinated by the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL), being one of them “The program of assistance to older adults in rural zones” whose objective is to improve living conditions of people older than 60 years old that live in poverty and in high and very high marginalization localities up to 2,500 inhabitants that are found within food poverty threshold¹³, understanding the same as the one where income per capita at homes is insufficient to cover food necessities corresponding to those stated by INEGI-CEPAL as basic foodstuffs (Secretariat of Social Development, 2003).

Furthermore, “Habitat Program” and “Program of Local Development in Micro-Regions” have the objective of rebuilding social tissue of the cities by investing in physical environment through different social development projects. The aim of both programs is to attain sustainable and integral development of territorial spaces that presents the highest marginalization rates in the country (Secretariat of Social Development, 2003). On its part, the objective of “Productive Options Program” consists on supporting living in poverty population to promote development processes by means of a strategy that generates productive options and that contributes to the formation of a social financing system, by promoting a socially co-responsible culture in overcoming poverty and having access to development starting from the local environment with both micro-regional and regional projection. Such programs are not addressed specifically to older adults but they could be benefitted indirectly (Secretariat of Social Development, 2003)¹⁴.

¹³ Through food and nutritional support.

¹⁴ It is important to mention the programs about Productive Options, Habitat, and Local Development in Micro-Regions as they may benefit the elderly community; however, structural violence is manifested itself in inequality

The National Institute for Older Adults (INAPAM) offers strategies to encourage political and social participation of the elderly through diverse programs¹⁵, being some of them: integral attention centers and clubs for older adults that organize social, educative, cultural, artistic, recreational, sportive and productive activities as handicrafts, craftwork, and trades, which encourage their organization and intervention in solving their problems, besides favoring their permanence within the community. On the other hand, cultural centers offer academic activities of complementary formation and other options in order to increase the attendees' cultural level by providing to them humanistic formation subjects, pedagogical disciplines, and languages. In addition, preventive actions are taken by means of seminars, courses, and lectures, as well as providing alternatives and advices on healthy aging supported by the national health record which allows a registry of basic prevention and control scheme for the most frequent diseases among the older adults (Secretariat of Health, 2001).

Likewise, and trying to reduce social deprivation, the department of legal assessment provides free-of-charge support, legal orientation, administrative management, and legal representation before courts to people of 60 years old and older that face legal problems. The INAPAM, along with the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL) and the Secretariat of Economics, through the National Fund for Supporting Social Enterprises (FONAES), constituted the Third Call fund program, "My word is worth three times". This fund provides assessment and financial supports (between MX\$500 and MX\$5,000) to older adults of scarce economic resources with viable productive initiatives so they can start or reinforce their businesses or "petit bourgeois' businesses", becoming a self-employment alternative; however, this program operates only in Distrito Federal.

Nowadays, although some laws, public policies, and national plans have been implemented to promote participation of the elderly in political life, their dispositions suffer to a greater extent from extension, financing, cooperation, and execution (Help Age International, 2002) being the reason why possible progress to diminish political deprivation gets hampered in practice for scarce diffusion and insufficient financing, thus maintaining existing inequalities. In relation to political participation, the challenge of those policies addressed to the elderly should be based on equality of rights and

for accessing opportunities. Therefore, the possibility exists in theory, but in practice, disadvantageous situation of older adult population restricts the possibility of having access to such programs.

¹⁵ With the purpose of preventing political and social deprivation of older adult population.

opportunities for older adults, fortifying the legislative frame through spreading of the same and establishment of sanctions (Ribeiro, 2000).

Nonetheless, in spite of the efforts to diminish political deprivation in the elderly population, there are still areas where active participation of the elderly remains absent, mainly regarding priority issues that concern them as a social group within the political agenda. Their incorporation is commonly not included nor considered necessary in spaces where projects addressed to this community are planned and managed. Social deprivation as a form of structural violence is observed by valuing the contribution of cultural, social, and historical legacy. Elderly presence in the processes of local, regional, and national development not only obeys a solidarity issue but also involves a valuable participation in planning social policies and constructing integral development of the nation.

With the purpose of continuing with a productive life, the Program of Employment for Older Adults' aim is to reincorporate them to productive lines so that they can rely on the necessary income for a fair life by means of work training and use of free time. To attain this, program maintains a permanent agreement with companies and institutions to offer job opportunities to this social group according to its characteristics and necessities; this group also receives computing training thus making possible their job opportunities (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social [STPS], 2003).

In order to reduce exclusion and discrimination of older adults, it is important to recognize their human rights and benefits that social capital of this community offers by granting them the part that in all fairness corresponds to them (Barreto, 2003). It is also necessary to disseminate a culture of respect and fair treatment, developing preventive actions and strategies to fight vulnerability situations by means older adults being the protagonists and have active participation of local agents, civil society, and nongovernmental organizations, etc. The INAPAM has created a program to disseminate a culture toward old age, with the objective of diminishing social prejudices related to the elderly; this program is coordinated along with the Secretariat of Public Education and their work is performed to instill awareness in population and to support a culture toward old age.

Does implemented Social Policy reduce structural violence?

The older adult population is considered a vulnerable group for their continuous and progressive biological, physical and mental deterioration; while the person is in fullness of life, his health, economy and social relations, may have changes that reduce their chances and intellectual, motor, physical, psychological and emotional capacities. These circumstances constrict their ability to work and function independently, which diminishes their access and job tenure (Help Age International, 2002).

Mexico as a nation acknowledges this vulnerability and establishes a regulatory framework that based the strategies and lines of action to reduce structural violence affecting this population group within the National Development Plan 2007-2012. However, despite the policy platform for the group of older adults, the risk of falling into situations of structural violence is increasing as State responses to eradicate vulnerability are very limited, because the strategy that has implemented the Federal Government, primarily focus on specific programs to address the basic needs of food and health.

Regarding the labor force participation of older adults, although it has been made some laws and public policies to promote and integrate them into a productive life, its provisions suffer mostly specific actions to equal opportunities in access to work and / or other options that allow them to own income¹⁶. So, possible to incorporate advances in the workplace, in practice is hampered by the denial of access or supply that give little monetarily profitable jobs, preserving existing inequalities. The Fund "The Third Call: My Word values for Three" offers key drivers and maintain the older adults life active in society; however, the program only operates in the Federal District, limiting its coverage and scope to only a portion of the elderly population of the country.

Politically, La LDPAM determines that older adults have the right to participate in all spheres of public life, the right to associate and form organizations to promote their development and influence specific actions that benefit and / or affect them as well as being part of the various representative bodies and public consultations. However, despite being set in the LDPAM, social policies for the elderly to promote political participation are absent, there are no strategies or programs that encourage or involve

¹⁶ Just as receive protection that give the provisions of the Federal Labour Act and other laws related to employment.

the active participation of older adults in the public life of the country, mainly in the priority issues that concern them as a social group within a political agenda, in the comprehensive planning of social development, in the formulation and implementation of decisions that directly affect their well-being, neighborhood, street, delegation or municipality. In this sense, the participation of older adults in public life, will strictly be a policy without direct action to support and promote the collaboration and contribution of older people to society.

Stands out in the speech the commitment to include and recognize the older adult population, this represents a step towards the visibility of older adults in society, but not its presence through active participation as an inclusive social construction. Older adults should exercise their right to participate as an integral aspect of their lives, which would be within the existing regulatory framework; however, still is not assumed in social practices to include them, the spaces where they plan and manage projects to this group, usually they not include them or consider their necessary incorporation. Older adults are not yet involved as lead vocals for the design of policies that relate to their lives, leaving them in a position where they are seen and not heard, preventing its recognition as active and evidencing an situation where passive and interventionist stance toward the elderly prevails.

In the social sphere, The LDPAM establishes the right of older people to autonomy and self-realization; that is to say, all actions aimed at older adults tend to strengthen their personal independence, decisiveness and personal development. However, when considering the total of older adults population as a a vulnerable group, social policies and programs for older adults reinforce the vision of a mythical age and relegated to a position of welfare recipients; for example policies aimed at the older population continues enunciated from the healthcare background and the strategic lines of action are constructed and oriented according to this perspective, therefore, there is contradiction between the guiding principle and the actions arising from the same .

So it is within the National Development Plan 2007-2012, which sets as common purpose to boost the social assistance as a primary platform. In this sense, the conceptualization from its approach limits its coverage and only fulfills emerging functions from critical problems (Help Age International, 2002). Despite the fact that autonomy and self-realization are within the existing regulatory framework is not assumed on specific strategies, as no guidelines to generate autonomy and self-

realization are marked. So, this unique vision of intervention through handouts, violent citizenship status of older adults with rights and responsibilities; and is opposed to the right to personal independence.

At the family level, The LDPAM states that the elderly are entitled to protection, primarily from his family, as well as the State and Municipal government. Meanwhile, the family has the responsibility to provide welfare and quality of life for its elderly. According to this law, the family plays a supporting role, collaboration and companionship for seniors. The absence or neglect in meeting their basic needs and exercise of their rights and guarantees are considered a type of violence towards them, because, in most cases, they rely on family services and public institutions for their support and welfare. However, there is no criminal penalties for it because it is not an offense under the criminal code, so even if you are required by law, the violation will not bring negative consequences, therefore, this situation allows to continue infringing on the older adults rights at home.

Conclusions

The structural violence suffered by the elderly community, displays a diversity of expressions which are the result of structural inequalities and increasing impoverishment. Inequality and inequity manifestations reflected in lack of access to education, employment, health systems and social protection. The poverty, political and social deprivation, exclusion and social marginalization, besides the stereotypes, discrimination, and devaluation of old age, decisively influence on the well-being of the elderly.

In order to analyze the social policies intervention and their impact on the reduction of structural violence, it is important to distinguish the concepts of equality and equity. The concept of equality is an empirical concept, and the concept of equity is an ethical imperative, associated with principles of social justice and human rights (Rico & Pamplona, 2003). Setting this difference between concepts, allow us to see the unequal opportunities for older adults, because in practice there is no equity reflected in the results or correspondence in actions. There is still much work to do in Mexico, even so there are programs to combat poverty, of social assistance and inclusion coordinated

by SEDESOL and INAPAM, is only a small step to remove existing inequalities. It is important that in practice visible results are reflected, since the vulnerability reduction of older people does not lie only on the political will or the creation of special services for this group, but it involves ensuring access to basic services, social inclusion and citizen participation through actions in line with the provisions of the LDPAM.

It is also relevant to consider the complex nature of the vulnerability of the elderly, as it is composed of multiple aspects and hardly supports segmented definitions, which is why a one-dimensional treatment of the sector is inefficient; since, as theme for public the agenda requires comprehensive approaches in its definition, and horizontal or transverse in their management processes (Subirats, 2002).

To convert to facts, the aspirations of the Mexican Constitution and the LDPAM represent an opportunity for older adults, the aspirations may be tangible through their inclusion in the spaces of social and political life, considering them as proposal actors and taking them into account, in a position that exceeds the conceptualization of aging and passive recipient of aid, and integrating a vision of protagonism in the contexts in which they live. The presence of older adults in processes of local, regional, national development obeys not only a matter of solidarity but involves meaningful participation in the planning of social policies and building the comprehensive development of the nation.

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